

## Gender mainstreaming in European policy: innovation or deception? Innovation or deception?

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## discussion paper

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### **Gender Mainstreaming in European Policy: Innovation or Deception?**

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## **Abstract**

Mainstreaming, an approach aimed at making policy more gender sensitive, has been taken globally on board by countries with widely varying policy machineries. This social innovation was launched in the context of Beijing 1995 by a network of women's movement activists, academics and politicians sometimes referred to as State Feminists. As a policy strategy for change, it utilizes the language of efficiency current in circles hoping to rationalize public bureaucracy. Yet, because it deals with gender, mainstreaming also illustrates, in a particularly provocative way, some more general problems in political innovation. Mainstreaming provides a good illustration of the paradoxes and ambiguities of gender as a motor for change in political organization. Mainstreaming seems to offer the potential to recoup the power of definition by making the image of the citizen behind the policy more 'evident' and erasing the premise of gender neutrality. The trick is carried out through the insertion of 'tools' like Trojan horses inside the policy process, using 'formal rationality' to reveal gender related negotiations.

This paper provides an initial discussion of the ways in which the mainstreaming approach aims at changing the definitions of the situation in government and secondly suggests factors that may affect whether the approach will actually succeed in various settings. It offers a framework for a consideration of the conditions necessary to ensure that mainstreaming becomes an institutional innovation and leads to gender being included in policy making as a given. It tests this using observations from the European Commission, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and regional and federal government in Belgium. The role of women's organizations, state feminist machinery, academics and policy frameworks are crucial variables to help predict whether mainstreaming remains rhetoric or becomes a useful approach to changing policy.

## **Zusammenfassung**

Mainstreaming, ein Ansatz zur Erhöhung der Geschlechtssensibilität von Politik, ist inzwischen weltweit von Ländern mit sehr unterschiedlichen politischen Strukturen übernommen worden. Diese soziale Innovation wurde im Kontext der Weltfrauenkonferenz in Peking 1995 von einem Netzwerk ins Leben gerufen, das sich aus Mitgliedern der Frauenbewegung, Wissenschaftlerinnen und Politikerinnen (manchmal „Staatsfeministinnen“ genannt) zusammensetzte. Als politische Strategie, die auf Veränderungen abzielt, benutzt sie die Rhetorik von Effizienz, die in Diskursen zur Rationalisierung öffentlicher Verwaltung geläufig ist. Aber weil ihr Gegenstand das Geschlechterverhältnis ist, beleuchtet Mainstreaming in besonders herausfordernder Weise allgemeinere Probleme politischer Innovation. Mainstreaming illustriert nachdrücklich die Paradoxien und Zwiespältigkeiten, die der Einsatz von „gender“ als Motor für Veränderungen

politischer Organisationen impliziert. Der Ansatz des Mainstreaming birgt möglicherweise das Potential, die Definitionsmacht zu verändern, indem er die Person des Bürgers/der Bürgerin verdeutlicht, auf den/die sich Politiken beziehen und indem er die Annahme von Geschlechtsneutralität in Frage stellt. Dies gelingt durch die Einführung von Instrumenten in den politischen Prozeß - vergleichbar einem Trojanischen Pferd -, wobei „formale Rationalität“ genutzt wird, um die Geschlechtsspezifik von Aushandlungsprozessen aufzudecken.

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Mainstreaming is both an innovative policy tool, gaining entry for social/cross cutting issues into new policy terrains, and ironically also a trickster. Its very success brings with it costs of both dilution and re-definition. More than half a decade after 'mainstreaming's' official international launch in the Platform for Action of Beijing conference in 1995 (UN 1995), as an approach to introduce equal opportunity and gender issues outside the women's policy ghetto, the term 'mainstreaming' has been adapted by other social movements, and has begun to be seen as a 'general policy approach' of the European Union (Bristow and Gore 2001) rather than the special purvey of women. For public policy enthusiasts, 'mainstreaming' has come to mean the transformation of sectorial, vertical policy approaches. With mainstreaming policy concerns are inserted horizontally, which leads to an integration into all policy areas generally. With mainstreaming, questions of women or children are no longer only dealt with by the women's or family policy machinery, or environment only by the Department of the Environment, but are also part of the dossier of the traffic commissioner and the office of Foreign Affairs.

Gender Mainstreaming aims to offer an answer to the problem of enabling the machinery of the state to deliver gender sensitive policy. It is an expression of the institutional establishment of a world wide women's movement which intends to fundamentally transform the definition of the situation. Launched by the UN but supported and proselytised by various international and regional organizations including the World Bank, the ILO, the OECD, the Nordic Council and sub-organizations of UN (Razavi and Miller 1994), mainstreaming has become a significant hallmark in European equal opportunity approaches. Any up-to-date chronology of European equal opportunity policy now includes mainstreaming as the last hurdle (Mazey 2000; Nelen and Hondeghe 2000; Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000; D'haveloos 1999). The European Union has explicitly adopted the strategy within the European Commission's various DG's (European Commission 1996). EU financing schemes and policy directives urge European governments to implement the approach in their own public administration and policy development. In its approach and in its aims, Mainstreaming can be considered as socially innovative policy, for it both deals with a relatively new and complex issue and is innovative in the way it addresses the policy process. As a

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<sup>1</sup> Versions of this paper have been presented at American Sociological Association, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, Sfs Dortmund, and the Universities of Bremen, Essen, and Frankfurt, during a period as Marie Jahoda Professor at the Ruhr Universität in Bochum in 2001. Many thanks to the wise commentators including Florence Bouvret, Hedwig Rudolph, Hildegard Theobald, Verena Schmidt, Ilse Lenz, Heidi Gottschalk, Monika Goldmann, and other students and colleagues, as well as an anonymous reviewer.



policy strategy for change, it utilizes the language of efficiency current in circles hoping to rationalize public bureaucracy. Not surprisingly, the idea has also become a catchword for diverse social movements ranging from the disabled to children's to anti-racist groups (Geyer 2000). Children's rights advocates have passed legislation to 'child-test' all policy in Belgium. The European Commission itself admits borrowing of the concept from gender policy to use in policy to combat racial discrimination (*Gender Equality Magazine* 2000:18). The very spread of the term is an indication of the danger that 'doing mainstreaming' will lose its specificity of being tied to moving gender to a cross-policy concern, ending up as a watered down article of faith or a 'principle of good governance'.<sup>2</sup>

When mainstreaming is about gender, it illustrates, in a particularly provocative way, some more general problems in social innovation. Mainstreaming provides a good illustration of the contradictions, paradoxes and ambiguities of gender in relation to socio-political organization. This paper provides an initial discussion of the ways in which the Mainstreaming approach aims at changing the definitions of the situation in government and secondly suggests factors that may affect whether the approach will actually succeed in various settings. After exploring the issue of definition of mainstreaming, it offers a framework for a consideration of the conditions necessary to ensure that the innovation of the Mainstreaming approach becomes an institutional innovation and leads to gender being included in policy making as a given. Some aspects of the framework are illustrated in a consideration of several cases of applications of gender mainstreaming in international, national and regional government. The paper explores the role of several social variables in the test case of the European Commission and several Northern European situations, as partially explanatory for the potential for deep-seated changes and the spread of attitude innovation. The variables include an estimation of the role of external experts, the commitment to a gender mission, the level of sophistication in terms of gender/policy issues and the environmental context of resistance to gender initiatives. The presence of established nodes of gender expertise and networks, and of self-evident connections to the variable of sex seem to promote easy nodes of attachment.

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2 In Chapter 7 of The European Technology Assessment Network Report (European Commission ETAN 2000) (cited in News from NIKK, no. 1, 2000, p. 5) we read that the principles of mainstreaming include building equality into the culture of the organisation and treating the employee as a whole person with respect and dignity, participation and vision', which sounds more like the principles of good human resource management than a specific policy approach. This is directly from principles summarized by Rees in a keynote speech in 1999, but has little to do with the way mainstreaming relates to policy and more to do with doing gender better in a work place, even though Rees acknowledges the transformative potential of mainstreaming (1999:2).

## **2. Social Movements and the Transformation of the State: Some Classic Paradoxes**

One of the main paradoxical problems in social change is that activists who are very critical of the apparently rational nature of the state, often play along with the rational/bureaucratic structure of the state to make things a little bit better, even when this means that their social legitimacy is eroded. Mainstreaming seems to offer feminists the potential to recoup the power of definition. It makes the image of the citizen behind the policy more evident and erases the premise of gender neutrality. The trick is carried out through the insertion of tools like Trojan horses inside the policy process, using formal rationality to reveal gender related negotiations. Femocrats, (feminists working within the public bureaucracy (Eisenstein 1995, 1996)), have already become old hands at this technique, but mainstreaming provides them with an officially acceptable platform. In this fashion, mainstreaming can be regarded as a kind of institutional innovation in the sense used by Nedelmann (1995) or Inhetveen (1998) for ultimately it is hoped that mainstreaming will lead to a virtually reflexive consideration of the impact of policy on gender relations.

The project of mainstreaming is an interesting example of women's organisations as policy entrepreneurs. It is a product of networking between academics, policy specialists and politicians at an international level (Reinalda 1997). Americans note that 'mainstreaming' as an approach was already wide spread in circles dealing with the integration of disabled or special students into normal education in the late sixties (Geyer 2000), although many Europeans would trace the heritage in gender terms to a cross fertilization between Gender In Development initiatives and such instruments as Environmental Impact Assessment (Woodward and Meier 1998). It is an illuminating example of how cross-cutting, apparently marginal (Dogan and Pahre 1990) and complex policy issues can lead to new policy approaches (Desvaux et.al. 1994). Mainstreaming has been taken globally on board by countries with wildly varying policy machineries, and at varying levels of government. Perhaps one of the more interesting developments is the extent to which mainstreaming is bypassing the national level for applications in local and regional government<sup>3</sup>. But being taken on board on a global basis has implications for political purity. The defenders of

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3 It should be noted here that in the years since Beijing's Platform for Action, mainstreaming has become a mini-industry, with the theme featuring in scientific conferences at both national and international level. One suspects that very few UN international accords have been so skillfully utilized to produce an upheaval in national governments. The requirement for a 5 year progress report allows motivated femocrats to shake down some more action on the part of their governments. The effectivity of the gender movement in using international fora to achieve local action has been noted elsewhere (Meyer and Prügl 1999 among many others) and thus it is no wonder that tactics are copied by other social movements. A survey of all the activities taken at the different levels of government, which seemed possible when I began this paper is now beyond the possibility of an individual scholar. This paper provides a snapshot of some of the more visible initiatives.

mainstreaming were frequently women with positions within the national governments who were also responsible for the negotiation of the Beijing Platform for Action that internationally launched the project. They hoped through mainstreaming to move toward a fundamental transformation of the state. But critics fear that states actually use the policy as an excuse to reduce specifically woman-focussed programming (Swiebel 1999; Epstein 1998). Another very real fear is that by sharing gender with non-experts and spreading it out across all sectors of society, the notion of gender will become an empty set. Seeing gender everywhere is almost as dangerous as never seeing gender at all.

For students of gendered social movements, public policy and organization, mainstreaming illustrates a number of classic dilemmas. Part of the problem is the issue of language and speaking Truth (in feminist terms) to Power (Widdavsky 1979). This is related to the dilemma of 'Whether the master's tools can be used to dismantle the master's house?' (Lorde 1994) and whether by working inside the state, one loses the purity of perspective of the outsider (Spalter-Roth and Schreiber 1995). The seeming capitulation of the state may only be a matter of cooptation, leading to the dilution of resistance (Selznick 1948). All of these concerns are of importance to those studying the dynamics and transformation of feminist movements. Many of the following questions derive from these concerns.

To what extent is it possible to merely insert gender concerns in an organisational setting designed with man in mind? Much feminist theory challenges the idea that the language and logic of society can be made to include women and women's interests as well. As a social movement, the women's movement in many countries (France, Italy, Wallonië, to some extent Germany) has taken a well-considered position outside the establishment, to maintain a clarity of analysis and challenge. By moving inside, in the guise of femocrats or other agents, there are necessary compromises which may ultimately prove fatal to the viability of the movement. Heikkinen (1999) is not alone in remembering that 'mainstream' in Anglo-Saxon feminist terms used to mean 'malestream' or dominant culture. Thus mainstreaming implicitly means accepting that there is a dominant culture.

A second set of dilemmas revolves around the issues of policy innovations and impact. Many new ideas are launched to change the policy process, but the central question of scientific concern is which factors (entrepreneurs, policy networks, value schemes, technological underpinnings, political-cultural context) are of crucial weight in determining whether an innovation will produce long-term change.

These questions are naturally interconnected. I will here focus on a question which combines a concern about the maintenance and achievement of the transformational goals of the women's social movement with an interest in the

ability of the democratic state to foster social change. To what extent are the critical success factors for mainstreaming as a policy approach connected to finding a language to speak Truth to Power in gendered terms? While mainstreaming can offer transformative results, it needs a language to do it in. This language must be a language understandable to those in public administration, the language of the state. Yet, in feminist criticism of the language of the state, and the conceptions underlying it, the problem is that Man is seen as the norm and Woman is seen as the specific or exceptional (Brouns 2001: Mossink and Nederland 1993). Further, language can be used to sideline issues. The confusion around the definition of mainstreaming works in the interests of those who are opposed to its transformational aims.

Thus the matter of definition of what mainstreaming is can be of crucial interest. Further, this issue of definition, in the European forum, is particularly interesting. We will see below that organizations adapt definitions of mainstreaming that are amenable to their institutional cultures, but actually are sometimes far from the UN ambitions. Gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities policy are complementary terms, not equivalent ones. Nonetheless, increasingly it seems that European Union institutions through gender mainstreaming are sometimes succeeding in pushing member states to actually reform policy approaches in issues that have until very recently, and under considerable lack of uniform consent, fallen solely under the purvey of the individual member states.

Examination of the definitions of mainstreaming and the policy instrument 'Gender Impact Assessment' and mainstreaming approaches adopted in several settings [Holland, Belgium and Europe (Council of Europe/ European Commission)] indicates that compromises in the language of gender have been necessitated. The further one gets from an environment that has taken gender on board through a sophisticated and broadly-based recognition of the problem, the more compromises in the tools which are meant to challenge and transform gender perception. Through a brief examination of the preliminary evidence of definitions used in different organisational settings where mainstreaming has been introduced, we may be able to identify factors that result in changes in language and conceptualisation of the underlying citizen image in policy. The amount of change seems to depend on how mainstreaming is introduced, by whom, the historical context, and the presence of opposition.

### **3. What is Mainstreaming?**

A first issue to be addressed in mainstreaming is that of definition. There is competition about whose definition will prevail, and the competition, as in much

organizational back and forth, may conceal fundamental underlying conflicts of interest. Appropriate definitions can allow enemies of the final goal of gender aware policy to use the terms to undermine the mission.

Gender mainstreaming is a principle or an approach to gender issues in state policy. Its point of departure is an acknowledgement of the differences between men and women. It is claimed that the sources of policy injustice are to be found in the fact that existing structures are not gender-neutral. (Rees 1998a: 172) Mainstreaming suggests that equal opportunities for women and men should no longer be achieved through ear-marked policies alone but that a multi-stranded and total approach is necessary. The various policy making fields should be infiltrated with gender awareness in order to incorporate equality goals into traditional policy areas (European Commission 1996; Sensi 1996). Previous efforts to achieve equality between men and women have focussed on changing the legislative framework by eliminating discrimination and creating a level playing field, and efforts to remedy the consequences of discrimination through affirmative actions. These two forms of action constitute the first two stories of what Nelen and Hondeghem term the Gender Equality House (2000), while mainstreaming forms the penthouse. Rees (1999) also uses metaphors, speaking of 'Tinkering' for legislative reform, 'Tailoring' for women-suited remedial strategies in a woman's polity ghetto, and 'Transformation' for the third stage of mainstreaming. Mainstreaming builds on the presence of the first two stages, but goes further.

Most national and international organizations trace a debt for the conceptualisation of mainstreaming and its obligations to the United Nations Beijing Platform for Action. Governments adopting the Beijing Platform for Action have undertaken a commitment to a strategy of mainstreaming gender perspectives throughout policy processes. The major component of the mainstreaming paragraph included in each major section of the Platform for Action is as follows:

"... governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively."<sup>4</sup>

The Council of Europe briefly summarizes its view with the definition 'Gender Mainstreaming' is the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by actors normally involved in policy making (Council of Europe 1998:15).

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4 Schalwyck and Woroniuk, 1998:27. The DAC Sourcebook summarizes the paragraphs in the Platform where the mainstreaming ambition appears: 79 (education) 105 (health) 123 (violence) 141 (conflict) 164 (economic activity) 189 (power and decision-making) 202 (institutional mechanisms for women's advancement), 229 (human rights) 238 (media) 252 (management of natural resources and the environment), 273 (children and youth).

But one of the problems is that there is a plethora of definitions of mainstreaming, ranging from very specific and measurable policy ambitions to vague articles of faith that can best be considered good business practice. Here below are a few other current definitions culled from international organizations and conferences organized to popularise the mainstreaming approach in the last four years. They range from very close to the original concept found in the Platform of Action to ones that do not seem very far from the old equal opportunity approach.

Other definitions:

### *ECOSOC*

Gender mainstreaming is 'the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.' (Agreed Conclusions of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, 1997/2 p. 28 cited in Hannan 2000).

### *Nordic Council of Ministers*

The integration of a gender and equality perspective requires evaluation, improvement, development and (re-)organisation of the policy processes, so that a gender and equality perspective is taken into consideration in all areas of policy, at all decision-making levels and in all phases, by the actors who are normally involved in the work.<sup>5</sup> URL: [http://www.oecd.org/subject/gender\\_mainstreaming/main\\_messages.htm#48/17/2001](http://www.oecd.org/subject/gender_mainstreaming/main_messages.htm#48/17/2001) described by Søren Christensen, Secretary-General of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

### *European Parliament*

Mainstreaming means that the promotion of equal rights for both genders is clearly seen to be integrated into all political fields and programmes at all administrative levels. The preparation of all proposals, plans and programmes in general and sectoral policy must also thus include a separate analysis of the effects on both genders of the decisions planned before those decisions are finalized (Comments of the EP committee for social affairs on the Commissions

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5 Found at website [http://www.oecd.org/subject/gender\\_mainstreaming/main\\_messages.htm#48/17/2001](http://www.oecd.org/subject/gender_mainstreaming/main_messages.htm#48/17/2001) described by Søren Christensen, Secretary-General of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Communication Incorporating equal opportunities-mainstreaming 24 July 1996 appendix to Kokkola report of EP, 18 July 1997, p. 20 (cited in Schunter-Kleeman 1999:4)).

### *ILO*

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. (Ulshoefer 2001; ILO definition inspired by ECOSOC definition of 1997)

### *OECD*

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for achieving equality between women and men in all areas of decision-making in the public and private sectors. It aims at realising the full potential of all members of society to contribute to social cohesion, competitiveness and growth. OECD webpage [http://www.oecd.org/subject/gender\\_mainstreaming/about/](http://www.oecd.org/subject/gender_mainstreaming/about/)

'Mainstreaming means transformation: it can be defined as integrating equal opportunities into all systems, structures, actions, policies, programmes and projects - into ways of thinking and doing' (Rees 1999:2).

...means taking systematic account of the differences between the conditions, situations and needs of women and men in all Community Policies...to explicitly mobilise all general activities and policies by introducing from the design stage an active and explicit regard for their possible effects on the respective situations of women and men.

### *European Commission 1996*

This situation can be tackled efficiently by integrating the gender equality objective into the policies that have a direct or indirect impact on the lives of women and men. Women's concerns, needs and aspirations should be taken into account and assume the same importance as men's concerns in the design and implementation of policies. This is the gender mainstreaming approach adopted in 1996 by the Commission, which the Commission intends to operationalise and consolidate through this proposal. European Commission (based on COM (2000) 335 final) 2001:15.

### *Conclusions from definitional confusions*

Once an organization has either been obliged or initiates itself a commitment to mainstreaming, an initial step seems to have been to translate and propagate the term as part of the organization's own culture. Initially it seemed that some organizations, such as different departments of the EU, simply used the term mainstreaming as a new way to market the ongoing problem of equal opportunities. This while the more gender advanced organizations such as the Nordic Council of Ministers were aware that the actual implication of mainstreaming was the gender-testing of policy *ex ante* and throughout the policy process. This contrast has to do with the very different starting points of the different places where mainstreaming is being used as a tool.

At a conference of the OECD in late 2000 (OECD 2000), government representatives sometimes admitted they were aware of the transformative implications of mainstreaming. The Irish minister of Equality noted that gender mainstreaming is fraught with difficulties, as it does not promise quick wins, requires disaggregated statistics, and a commitment of resources over a long term and expertise, but that it promises gains impossible with either legislative reform or positive actions. At the same conference, however, demonstrating the wide distance and misuse of the idea of mainstreaming, Heinz Fischer from Deutsche Bank, claimed that business had been doing gender mainstreaming for years - indicating that business understood gender mainstreaming as simple equal opportunity in employment, and management of diversity.<sup>6</sup>

It is easy to conclude with MacKay and Bilton (2000:2) that "There is widespread misunderstanding and confusion over the meaning of mainstreaming and related concepts...mainstreaming is sometimes referred to as a tool, sometimes a process or method, and sometimes a strategy." One of the main elements of confusion is that between equal opportunity and affirmative action and gender mainstreaming. As the DAC Sourcebook explains, equal opportunities is more of a human resource approach aimed at providing equal opportunities for women and men in the workplace (Schalkwyck and Woroniuk 1998). Not surprisingly, when the European Commission attempted to adopt mainstreaming in 1996, they needed to couple the idea to the labour market, as they lacked the legal foundation of the Treaty of Amsterdam. However, the misconception that mainstreaming is simply equal opportunities is wide spread and can be seen in

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6 'Governments have much to learn from business about gender mainstreaming. Studies show that companies practicing gender mainstreaming and which have made advances in gender equality have higher productivity and profitability. According to Heinz Fischer of Deutsche Bank, "We look at it as a question of survival, not as altruism." Half of Deutsche Bank's clients are women. They have different perspectives as well as purchasing and investing patterns than men, and they are attracted to specific types of investment instruments. Many prefer to discuss important business directly with women, who may be more sympathetic". (Summary remarks OECD, 23-24 November 2000, Conference on Mainstreaming, available at website).



a number of the types of projects that are now being called 'mainstreaming'. Gender mainstreaming is different and should be transformative: "a deliberate and systematic approach to integrating a gender perspective into analysis, procedures and policies" (Schalkwyck and Woroniuk 1998).

#### **4. Moving from Theory to Practice when the Theory is Muddy**

How to achieve mainstreaming has become a kind of official mission for feminist thinkers looking for the next step in progress for women in the advanced countries. That this term has become a European buzz word is in part due to the motivating efforts of the actors within European Commission which claims it was thinking about mainstreaming long before the UN conference in Beijing. Mainstreaming is an explicit goal, anchored in the Treaty of Amsterdam and supported by resolutions. The approach of the Commission is defined in 'Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities' (COM (1996) 67 final 21.2.1996). This formulation links up with a focus on equality rather than difference, but informal formulations after the Treaty of Amsterdam increasingly make space for a policy that recognizes difference and diversity (European Commission, *Gender Equality Magazine* for example). Officially, the EU called for the development of methodological guidelines to build an equal opportunities dimension into all policies of the European Union (Hoskyn 1997, 1999; Sensi 1996, 1997). Especially important in stimulating interest for mainstreaming in member states has been the explicit coupling of a requirement to demonstrate gender awareness in applications for support under the European Social Fund (European Commission.(e-Linda) 2001 mentions a 10% quota for gender earmarked money). European interest has also been stimulated by the initiatives of the Council of Europe to constitute an expert group on mainstreaming (Council of Europe 1998). Finally most European countries have agreed to implement the Platform for Action resulting from the 1995 UN conference on Women in Beijing which mandates an engagement in promoting gender equality across all policy areas for the empowerment of women. The reports from governments on progress since the Platform of Action, the Beijing+5 reports, indicate a varying level of awareness of the implications of engaging in Mainstreaming (Council of Europe 2000), as many governments seem not to have taken any concrete actions—although moving the goal posts further may have stimulated governments to make more work of more traditional equal opportunities efforts.

Tactically, a move from focussing on women's issues to looking more broadly at gender relations is a strategy for not only gender studies (Alvesson and Due Billing 1997:205) but also useful in politics. Adapting a 'gender' ap-

proach rather than a 'woman's' or 'feminist' approach can help win a broader audience for gender issues and improve policy. The campaign to achieve an international agreement to do mainstreaming, spearheaded by feminists from the more advanced emancipation administrations, reveals a faith that policy making can and will make a difference. This faith is an essential underpinning of politics in democratic societies, according to policy analyst Wayne Parsons. Yet, he also notes "The danger is that this belief leads to the formation of an illusion in the mind of both voter and politician which assumes that the possibilities of control and manoeuvre are bigger than they actually are" (Parsons 1995:607). How limited the possibilities are in the case of mainstreaming has to do not only with the complexities and resistance of government agencies, but also with the fact that the mainstreaming approach was adopted without adequate instruments for implementation.

One way that gender mainstreaming can be interpreted is that every policy suggestion should be accompanied by some kind of an analysis of the potentially differing consequences for men and women - but this demands not only consciousness and political will but also good statistics, expertise, instruments, training and new procedures. Finally there must be a coordinating body that can monitor all of this (Swiebel 1999:5). Even such a post-ante evaluation involves substantial resources and a new way of looking at the policy process. Actually, true mainstreaming would involve having a gender awareness at every step of the policy process from initial policy suggestion to evaluating outcomes. Gender awareness would, as a result of mainstreaming, become habitual in policy making, an institution based on a new definition of the situation.

Mainstreaming is on the one hand held out as a new hope by femocrats, but on the other hand has become increasingly controversial. The flurry of definitions indicates part of the danger, as the same word means very different things in different governmental contexts. Some interpret the approach as meaning that vertical institutions for equal opportunity policy will necessarily disappear, thanks to the change in attitude in policy making that mainstreaming would bring about. This risk has become so potent that the European Commission femocrats have increasingly had to emphasise that gender mainstreaming involves an active dual or twin-track strategy. Specific policies addressing specific women's issues will continue to exist and, as the European Parliament suggests (European Parliament resolution A4-0072/99), even be strengthened, at the same time as mainstreaming is promoted. The intention was that resources to remedy gender inequality would be increased, but the risk is that with mainstreaming, gender issues might simply disappear.

Another perhaps unanticipated possibility is that through the permutations of multi-level governance appearing in Europe, the gender questions are not so much disappearing from the agenda of the state as being transferred to different levels. While new resources may not be being pumped in at the national level,

requirements for project money for labour market initiatives at the local and regional level may stimulate local consciousness and development of expertise. While the vertical initiatives of national women's policy machinery may have had difficulty in probing to the grass roots level of municipal governance, funding opportunities from the European Union that have taken mainstreaming seriously may bring about new alliances between gender activists and policy makers at the more local level (European Commission 2000; European Commission Employment & Social Affairs 2001a).

## **5. What's so Innovative about Mainstreaming?**

That mainstreaming as an approach can be seen as an innovation and thus is attractive to other social movements is due to at least three reasons. First of all, it allows social issues to escape from policy ghettos in the margins, where the risk of elimination is high, by transforming a question from a vertical special issue to horizontal. Parallels are of course possible with environmental issues, which were the first to successfully manoeuvre this pathway. Secondly, mainstreaming is innovative as it spurs new policy instruments. Mainstreaming in effect only means doing policy with varied citizens in mind - but as it is framed in a rational public management language, the ambitions are tested and evaluated; continuous evaluation is one of the key demands of the mainstreamers. To do this, new policy instruments are demanded including the development of gender equality indicators gender proofing instruments, and methods to involve the entire organization in the effort. Finally, gender mainstreaming links an 'irrational' transformative social movement goal - the end of sexual inequality - to rational public administrative tools. Mainstreaming and its implementation would denote using the tools of reason to gain power over the definition of women in a structure.

### *From Vertical to Horizontal*

As we noted above, much of women's policy in the sixties and seventies was addressed by governments as a vertical issue, and placed in the governmental structure in a special set of Women's Offices (Mazur and Stetson 1995) or gender equality machinery with low resources. The mainstreaming analysis suggests that the entire framework of policy and its thinking needs to be challenged. Gender concerns needed to be inserted horizontally in all policy areas.

## *New tools*

However, one of the problems was a lack of policy tools. To assess policy in terms of gender, some of the following issues need to be examined in every policy area, according to Rees (1998b) and the Council of Europe (1998) group of experts under the leadership of Verloo:

- To what extent is a policy area conceived of in androcentric terms?
- What is the situation of women in the sector and are there gender disaggregated statistics available?
- Who is participating in policy decisions?
- What will the impact of proposed policy have on gender relations?
- How could a more gender sensitive policy be conceived of or 'visioned' (Rees 1998a:177)?
- How will we know if we have been effective in pushing change?

To do this assessment, instrumentation is necessary, but there may also need to be a new approach to policy making itself, demanding cultural changes and new actors. A number of tools and analysis techniques have been developed including: Gender Proofing, Gender Impact Assessment, Emancipation Effect Reporting, Gender Indicators, Checklists of Actions for Gender Mainstreaming (UNDP) and various benchmarking schemes. An example of the tools that have been considered as a weapon in the mainstreaming battle is Gender Impact Assessment (GIA). GIA as an approach to improving the gender sensitivity of state policy making is a relatively recent policy tool which is now attracting great interest as a method to horizontally address gender emancipation ambitions in all areas of state policy. Many countries and organizations have developed instruments for designing and/or testing their policy in the making along gender principles (Verloo and Roggeband 1994; Status of Women Canada 1996; Ministry of Women's Affairs 1996; Franken 2001; Council of Europe 2000 report; European Commission Directory of Projects 2001a). Others have programmatic ambitions, working groups and/or research dedicated to mainstreaming and thinking about using gender check listing to evaluate and improve policy.

## *Rational and Irrational Elements in Mainstreaming: Innovative and Effective or Subversive, Transformative, and Empowering?*

The elements of rationality that might lead us to say that mainstreaming is a device of reason are primarily to be found in instrumentation that has been developed thus far, such as Gender Impact Assessment, Emancipation Effect Reporting and Gender Indicators. These tools, through the use of criteria for success and demand for sound measurement, help test how goal efficient (in terms of the goal of gender equality) a policy has been. As such, they are a reflection

of a school of public management thought that can be characterized as 'rational'.

The rationality approach to public administration hopes that through the use of 'good information', the Truth that Wildavsky (1979) hoped policy makers would find, policy will become more goal efficient. Policy makers should set goals and use criteria for measuring success. An instrument such as the GIA allows government to test the gender-sensitivity and awareness of its policy within the framework of such rationality. Rationality in the sense of full information for decision making could actually imply empowerment. Mainstreaming and its implementation would denote using the tools of reason to gain power over the definition of women in a structure. Addressing gender seriously is then rational as it means better and more responsive policy. But the feminist critique of the problems with public rationality remains unanswered, and explosive.

The theoretical roots of gender mainstreaming are in gender analysis and feminist theory, while the practical roots can be found in the traditions of radical social movements for the developing world, the disabled and the environment. Rationality as sketched above can be seen as one part of a dichotomy which on the other side is the emotional and irrational. This dichotomy finds its parallel in the stereotypical ideas of masculinity and femininity. Most extremely, Kathy Ferguson (1984) has argued that rational bureaucracy and feminism are natural enemies. We would wish to avoid unnecessary stereotyping such as the association of masculine with rational and negative (Alvesson and Due Billing 1997: 202-203) and thereby 'inhuman', but it is also important to recognize that the 'rational' wish to make policy more responsive to women and thereby more democratic actually has transformative aims and effects. These may seem to participants in government to be 'irrational', as they challenge gender relationships that are taken for granted.

Feminist theory about gender in organisations puts an emphasis on the irrational and subconscious processes that lead to oppression. Gender insensitivity is not only a result of structures but of the rationales and understandings that underlie those structures (Benschop and Dorrewaard 1998; Martin 1998; Müller 1998; Goetz 1995). The interesting question is the extent to which policy can have an impact on the structural power relations between the sexes in terms of, for example, their intimacy, ability to carry out caring, or segregation in the economy as expressed in thinking of Dutch feminists such as Verloo and Roggeband (1994, 1996) or Brouns and Scholten (1997). But to get at these frequently non-rational relationships may require different approaches than those suitable within the rational bureaucracy.

Early experience with attempting to apply gender impact assessment indicates that the thought processes necessary to see androcentrism for example, are extremely subversive and meet with substantial resistance. One of the

issues in mainstreaming is whether the rational state can be trusted to look within itself for the irrational gender presuppositions. Should the testing of the state best be carried out by 'gender professionals' who are able to be 'double gangers' - speaking both the language of gender awareness and feminism honed by academic training as well as the language of public administration? Can we trust the state to police itself or do we need a 'gender police'?

## **6. The Dangers of Mainstreaming?**

That mainstreaming seems to have been so easily accepted by the signatory countries to the Beijing action platform could be an indication that while gender-aware policy makers and feminists seem to be speaking the same language as power holders who have complied with their requests, what that language might mean in practice is perhaps quite different. A policy with such transformative potential has seldom been taken on with such alacrity.

The substantial scope for misunderstanding is indicated in the wide variety of approaches to doing mainstreaming and in some of the attempts to eliminate special women's policy machinery. A first problem is the term 'mainstreaming' itself. We discussed the issue of definition above and how it can be strategically utilized to narrow the scope of the ambitions of mainstreaming. The term itself is also problematic. It has been appropriated and given a new meaning. For social movement activists used to being in the margin, the mainstream is a suspicious place. This common word with an established definition has been appropriated for a specific policy approach, but has not yet been imbued with new meanings for every user. The further away from the femocrat centre, the more frequent the misunderstanding of the term and its specific connotations. In European policy, the issue becomes even more complicated as all language groups are forced to adopt the English term, which leads to yet other uncontrollable currents of resistance unrelated to gender.

A second issue is the fact that since gender or women's issues up until the present have been at best the responsibility of a special women's policy machinery in government, it is hardly self-evident that other policy sectors take on responsibility for seeing the gender aspects of their particular area. Some make the claim that gender awareness is an expertise to be carried out by gender professionals (who are schooled in for example Women's Studies, or even further, certified). The instruments developed thus far promote, to a greater or lesser degree, an 'expert' rational-technocratic approach, with separate jargon and measurement criteria.

Agneta Stark (1998), who has been the 'flying expert' bringing gender mainstreaming to the Swedish public bureaucracy talks about deaf-man conversations between the non-expert public bureaucrat who has to be made to see how gender is relevant to his policy area, and the gender expert. The gender expert says 'low pay', or 'lack of promotion' or 'lack of sex split statistics' or 'relations of gendered power' and the male administrator hears and uses the personal examples of 'my wife' or my 'secretary', females who are in his case 'not discriminated'. To get around this problem, she suggests 'Create routines, and mainstream gender into existing routines...once routines become just that, routine, they require a lot of activity to change back again' (Stark 1998). This would be the approach that could ultimately lead to a new definition of the situation, Inhetveen's 'institutional innovation'. An institutional innovation is a routine that becomes a matter of habit, creating a new institution within a pre-existing institutional and cultural context. This is similar to the way gender quotas are treated by parties in Norway (Inhetveen 1998).

Mainstreaming is the wish to see ultimately that a gender reflex is introduced, a social pattern that is persistent and regular in the policy process. An essential condition is that old routines in the process are changed as Benschop and Verloo (2000:24) note in connection with a case in Flanders. This, as Stark (1998) suggests, can be stimulated first by a policy ritual - for example filing a gender impact statement on law proposals and policy proposals, but ultimately should become institutionalised, and not need to be constantly watch dogged by action groups. A difficulty with this classic strategy is that it tends ultimately to make bureaucracies even more top-heavy, bringing resistance from those entrusted with carrying out such checks.

Such institutional innovation occurs best in a context where values are present that can be mobilized in service of the new institution. Inhetveen (1998) discusses this in the context of quota regulations for women, but mainstreaming and putting in new policy goals could also be seen in this framework. Not only is training necessary for the institutionalisation of gender awareness in policy making, but also a high level of cultural acceptance, for a procedure will only become an institution if it becomes taken for granted, no longer questioned.

The strategic problem is to develop something that circumvents the personalization of gender issues by bureaucrats and makes doing a gender analysis of a policy proposal as automatic as 'making a budget'. It should be something that can be learned and carried out by our Weberian ideal typical androgynous servant of the state. But mainstreaming gender is not quite like doing a budget in that the language of gender is still not the general language of society. A procedure not firmly based on common values will have a much more difficult job in becoming effective and in being continued.

Mainstreaming needs to be hard, and measurable, and will in this way be authoritative. The drive of the femocrats is to find instruments, that can speak the language of power to male dominated units in planning, roads, infra structural funds and other seemingly gender-neutral domains so that the gendered aspects of their activities become visible. The risk is that in finding the common language and routines, the transformative potential of asking the gender questions and questioning structures of power may be lost. Close analysis of national reports submitted in fulfilment of Beijing +5 suggests that administrators in sectors where gender-awareness is only minimally present grasp at any straw to claim that they have already 'mainstreamed'.

## **7. Mainstreaming as Rational and Innovative Practice**

In practice, governments attempting to bring gender into their policy process across the board, to mainstream, have used various approaches. They begin with a tool box for doing mainstreaming - one tool or a mix - with options ranging from analysis, awareness and training to measurement. The question is what factors have been important in leading to a watered down approach to mainstreaming as opposed to realizing the transformative potential. Judging from early experience, as well as evidence from case studies done on the European Union (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000; Braithwaite 2001; Bretherton 1999, 2001; Mazey 2000; Engström 2000), although mainstreaming is supposedly an across the board approach, when gender issues escape the women's policy ghetto, they do not take root equally strongly in other policy areas. This is not solely due to the relative affinity or lack of clear-cut affinity to women's issues.

All of these authors have begun to develop predictive frameworks for the potential of mainstreaming to be taken on board by an organization. Bouvret (2001) points out that while the predictive framework of Hafner-Burton and Pollack suggests that sympathetic policy frames would lead one to expect that DG Development could have made great strides in mainstreaming, in fact it has been left behind by DG Research due to institutional factors. Much of the success of mainstreaming will depend on the institutional and organizational setting and the methods used to carry out the project. Schalkwyck and Wornouik (1998:21-23), writing about the potential for development projects to mainstream, are among those<sup>7</sup> who set out some of the critical factors for predicting success. They identify the institution's mandate and area of work, its organizational history and culture, the current personnel, organizational routines and

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<sup>7</sup> See also OECD Conference in November 2000 on mainstreaming where many nordic countries outline limiting factors on success. Main Messages, [http://www.oecd.org/subject/gender\\_mainstreaming/main\\_messages.htm](http://www.oecd.org/subject/gender_mainstreaming/main_messages.htm)



procedures, and external environment and pressures. On a case to case basis, such variables can be evaluated within a comparative framework and offer both predictions for success as well as handles for organizational change.

They share in many ways the perspective of the Web of Institutionalisation developed by Caren Levy (1996, 1998) for Gender in Development projects. She identifies 13 interdependent elements that are considered as essential for gender institutionalisation, including institutional culture, political commitment, the location of gender responsibilities, political responsibilities, the dominant frame of culture, resources, procedures and instruments, the quality of data; and the knowledge level of the staff.

An analysis of UN budgeting projects (Hannan 2000) indicated the importance of similar factors: Clear policy statements on gender equality and the work of the organisation; clarity on gender mainstreaming in planning and budget instructions; explicit management support for gender mainstreaming; strong oversight and accountability functions; and increased dialogue between programme staff, budget staff and gender specialists were all seen as essential for successful mainstreaming, and no easy recipe. Some of the constraints identified were not directly related to gender perspectives but concerned technical and political capacity to produce clear statements on objectives and indicators.

For the purpose here of estimating the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming, based on observations of early results in situations documented in northern Europe, it seems to this author that the following variables can all be expected to play a role in the depth of transformation of public policy discourse and its gender sensitivity. This is a simplified model, including aspects of other observers, but especially dedicated to identifying the potential for institutional transformation, by focusing in part on the actors and their belief cultures.

- (1) *Experts and their role*: Who is given the task of carrying out mainstreaming? The Council of Europe definition indicates that 'actors normally involved in policy making'(1998:15) should be the ones responsible. This would mean the use of in-house personnel, coming perhaps from the women's policy machinery. Of course governments can choose between having their own personnel attempt to make previously gender-insensitive policy better or using external consultants with special gender competency. The use of an expert consultant fits in well with the technocrat approach to rational administration. 'Gender-awareness' can be marketed as a technical expertise, to be able to calculate gender effects can become a specialization much like those of consultants working on environmental effects. Further much of the rhetoric of mainstreaming is rather hermetic. It is transparent only to the initiated. However, if the goal of mainstreaming is transformation of the perception of the average bureaucrat and institutional transformation, then external experts need to be coupled to a training

process and evaluation to create learning carry over. Otherwise the departure of the expert will mean the departure of awareness.

- (2) *The role of a gender mission and commitment and historical context* - How all-encompassing is the commitment to changing gender relations and how well-anchored is it in the administration? Is it a policy managed by an ad-hoc group of cabinet members corralled by the Prime Minister in a symbolic political effort or does it come from a framework of a national commitment to equal opportunities or gender emancipation that predates the commitments made in the Beijing treaties? There can be varying degrees of consensus about the goals of a gender policy and different sorts of emphases. A particular government may emphasize economic autonomy for women, equal opportunities or equal rights. They may have a wide spread network of femocrats bearing this vision into various divisions of the public bureaucracy. On the opposite side of the continuum are the numerous governments who have isolated the 'woman question' to a group of transitory employees in a special office who work on policy developed by, for example, one particular minister, rather than a policy taken by the government as a whole. Accountability is a special issue - going back to measurement - can managers be held accountable for their achievements, and are their indicators for success in achieving a gender sensitive policy approach? A sub variable here may be the importance of a *gender hero*. All analysis schemes include the importance of real commitment from top figures in the organization, but case studies frequently identify one top power holder as being essential in convincing other top managers. In Nelen and Honddeghem's (2000) metaphorical gender equality house, this commitment forms the roof, but actual examples of successful mainstreaming indicate that political and mission commitment may be the fundament. Policy entrepreneurs and heroes in alliances are important as is the degree of policy access.
- (3) *The role of gender sophistication*. How well-versed are actors in the administration on gender issues? Are research, gender-sensitive data sources and training available to develop gender expertise? Some administrations have already developed a vision about how gender inequality arises and have ideas about the tools necessary for change. They may have a gender vocabulary that is shared by people working in various fields and anchored in a shared understanding. The establishment of specialized gender studies at advanced levels influences the availability in the public forum of sophisticated understandings of the workings of gender. An example of this situation is found in Holland, where the instruments to do gender testing were anchored in a sophisticated theoretical understanding of gender relations. Aspects of policy to be examined then included issues such as an analysis of problems of organization of intimacy, the gendered division of labour, and the identification of processes of resources and gender rules (Verloo and Roggeband 1996 ). This can be contrasted with the case in Flanders, where the new minister of Equal Opportunities had

yet to develop an analysis of the reasons for gendered inequality, and was faced with inadequate data on gender relations. Here efforts to analyse the gender impacts of policy were inserted in a policy framework and state machinery with no gender vocabulary (Woodward and Meier 1998).

- (4) *The role of value context and resistance.* To what extent are there vested interests that would be opposed to the transformation of gender relations or a re-allocation of resources to enhance opportunities for women? If for example, an analysis of European Union science policy indicates that women are substantially underprivileged and recommends monitoring for better apportionment of resources including new scientific terrains, this will be unpopular with those expecting a piece of the traditional scientific pie. The stronger the resistance to serious questioning of the fundamentals of gender in policy and in the administration itself, the more likely that the new questions of mainstreaming will be 'misinterpreted' to mean that specific earmarked equal opportunities policies should be discontinued and replaced by empty motions.

We see in the mainstreaming instruments and approaches thus far developed (an in-depth review is beyond the confines of this discussion paper, but can be found in Council of Europe 1998, 2000; MacKay and Bilton 2000; Beveridge et al. 2000) a range of intrusiveness and sophistication. Here is where the coupling of the masculinity of rationality and the feminist irrationality of policy transformation reveals the contradictions. More "rationally" coloured bureaucracies, less infiltrated with gender-awareness, will be resistant to mainstreaming in its transformative sense of empowerment, and develop responses that are symbolic waves at gender awareness. The question of the variation in sophistication and thoroughness becomes clearer when we look at the state of the prime European promoter of gender mainstreaming, the European Commission. Given its central role as an example, the European institutions experience with mainstreaming has already formed the object of several studies (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000; Schmidt 2001; Bretherton 2001; Rees 1998b, 2000; Schunter-Kleeman 1999, 2000; Mazey 2000, Bouvret 2001; Braithwaite 2001). We can briefly consider the case of the Commission here and see how it helps us develop a hypothesis to predict success of evolving programs, using the factors mentioned.

## **8. The European Commission: A Preliminary Test**

### *The use of experts*

The European Commission has made a relatively limited use of experts in the implementation of mainstreaming, primarily to author a small guide for Gender

Impact Assessment to be used by DG level bureaucrats and provide specialized advice (the National experts delegated to DG V [now called Employment and Social Affairs] are a case in point - and come disproportionately from Northern Europe, even outside the EU. There was an expert from Norway 1996-9 with substantial experience in Norwegian gender policy). Thus the Commission only partially follows the recommendation of the Council of Europe that it use actors normally involved in policy making. Bureaucrats who have been appointed as responsible for Equal Opportunity policy within their units are to control policy emanating from their units. However, one of the showpieces of mainstreaming, the integration of gender thinking in the European Structural funds and the European Funds for Regional Development was assisted by an external expert who notes that the success was primarily due to "active support in terms of financial and human resources" (Lausberg 1999:2). Further, the internal bureaucrats in most divisions only use about 10% of their time for gender issues.

### *The role of the gender mission*

The European Union bases its gender mainstreaming engagement on a number of statements of formal commitment (see summary European Parliament 1999, Resolution preamble and points A-F), and has been strengthened in the foundation of its claims by the commencement of the terms of the Treaty of Amsterdam in May 1999. A high level group of Commissioners was appointed in 1995 to follow gender issues, which symbolizes commitment from the top to the gender mission. However, informants are critical about the engagement of many of the members of this group. Given the recent scandal and resignation of the Santer Commission it could perhaps be just as well that the Commission did not too whole-heartedly engage itself. The European Parliament noted the lack of knowledge about gender issues at the highest level of decision-making and recommended giving this highest priority (1999: point 7).

Formally, there is commitment to a gender mission, but informally there is no really widespread network of femocrat policy entrepreneurs. They are instead located in pockets of gender awareness and commitment close to policy areas of traditional 'female' concern (gender, development, education to some extent, and recently Research and Science Policy). Many would agree with Swiebel, who states that there is "for a longer time an apparently growing dis-orientation in which the emancipation policy at the European level has fallen. A clear vision is lacking...what is European emancipation policy really all about?" (1999:6).

### *The role of gender sophistication*

Nonetheless, the work of the Equal Opportunities Cell and its network of contracted academic feminists and former and present national experts is a rich

and fairly sophisticated source of ideas. The very spread of the idea of mainstreaming through a variety of projects with EU support (EU local government initiative, European Structural Funds, NOW efforts, EQUAL) is an indication that the institutions of the European Union provide a kind of a bench-mark level of sophistication in gender issues for some countries. The problem is that this sophistication remains in a feminist ghetto. Further, the sophistication is watered down when it comes to influencing the gender mission, which is related to the previous point. The European Parliament's (1999) review of mainstreaming progress indicates that the parliament "is disappointed that the measures that have thus far been taken have had little visible influence on the commission policy, with the exception of policy areas where there was already a long tradition and knowledge present on the promotion of equal opportunities for men and women". While the experts of the Commission recommend sophisticated state of the art policy for others, their own versions for their own internal testing seem very rudimentary, and stop at the question level, never proceeding to transformation. Policy makers in the Commission are asked simply in the SMART instrument - (Simple Method to Assess the Relevance of Policies) "Is gender relevant to your policy area' and if so 'How do you integrate gender concerns in the policy area"? (Council of Europe 1998:62).

#### *The role of context and resistance*

From all quarters (informants in EU and lobby groups such as the European Women's Lobby, European Parliament) there is a uniform criticism that mainstreaming and gender concerns do not touch the core areas of European Union policy and spending, such as agriculture, foreign policy, competition, environment and transport. While these bastions may be traditionally hard to breach, even more disturbing is the fact that despite consistent lobbying "the great ambitions [of gender mainstreaming] do not stand up in relation to the tangible realities" (Swiebel 1999:5). The big new policy questions such as Agenda 2000 and the expansion to Eastern Europe (Bretherton 1999, 2001) hardly mentioned the notion of women or gender, although this has been rectified to some extent with the ambitions of the new Community Strategy on Gender Equality 2001-2005 (European Commission Employment & Social Affairs 2001b).

There is substantial resistance in the core cultures of the institutions of the European Union to allowing gender to escape from the Equal Opportunities ghetto. This is symbolized by the extremely slow movement in appointments of women to higher decision-making posts in the bureaucracy, but even more dangerously by the way that mainstreaming is being utilized by some forces in the institutions. The special sector of the European Social Funds for women's employment (NOW) will in the future lose its earmarked 'women's money' status to see the issue 'mainstreamed' across employment policy. The European Parliament's own Commission on the Rights of Women narrowly escaped being disbanded at the end of the 1998 legislature, as allied men blithely claimed that

with mainstreaming, they no longer had a function (*Women of Europe Newsletter* May/June 1999).

These factors will make the success of gender mainstreaming as transformative policy innovation quite difficult in the European Union setting, despite the presence of strong voices to move forward and external pressure from lobby groups such as the European Women's Lobby. Based on this preliminary discussion of the European Union case in terms of these factors, I suggest the following hypothesis as fruitful for further investigation inside organizations, adding an additional factor to the list of variables:

## **9. Hypothesis**

The greater the resistance and dominance of masculine rationality in a public administrative setting, and the lower the level of support for values of gender equality, the more likely that any initiative to mainstream will strand as an extremely simple instrument incapable of inducing transformative policy changes.

The substantial variation in approaches to mainstreaming present in the various divisions of the European Commission, can be somewhat organized through regard for clarifying variables (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000; Braithwaite 2001; Bouvret 2001). This suggests the need for comparative research on the inroads of mainstreaming into normal policy making cross-nationally. The research on the European Union indicates that mainstreaming does not proceed apace in all areas of policy at equal speed. To give an indication of what insights further comparison may provide and to explore the utility of the variables indicated above, I have grouped a few of the catalogued examples of good practice in development of instruments in projects of mainstreaming from the Council of Europe 1998 report as well as several Belgian cases along two dimensions suggested by the above discussion of important variables:

- That of the level of expertise called in to develop a mainstreaming instrument (do administrations work with their own untrained or semi-trained bureaucrats or with certified experts?);
- that of the level of gender sophistication and commitment as evinced in official policy and length of experience with gender questions.

A related dimension of analysis could be an evaluation of the level of commitment of power holders to seeing actual results of mainstreaming, including some measurement of financial and human capital resources invested. As a bare minimum, a policy statement from the chief executive going beyond the acceptance of the Beijing Action Platform seems necessary, but as noted above

in the case of the EU up until 1999, even the creation of a government cabinet level working group is not always a reliable indicator of level of commitment.

The projects included here were selected from the Council of Europe report of 1998 and were ones where available documentation and personal interviews helped in providing background information. They crystallize the issue of the role of the gender expert from outside or inside the bureaucracy, and the issue of simplification which holds the danger of deception rather than transformation in mainstreaming.

*The approaches chosen are the following:*

- (1) 'Flying Expert' was one of the approaches used by the Swedish government to carry out gender analyses in the various ministries of the Swedish national government, whereby an expert with gender competence would analyse a department in consultation with that administration to develop a comprehensive program for allowing the administration to carry out gender mainstreaming on its own (Stark 1998).
- (2) For many years Sweden has in its association of municipalities, had large scale projects on gender equality in local authorities (Local Authority Self Examination). In connection with mainstreaming, a program called 3-R's was launched, and carried out by municipalities themselves. The initial focus was however, primarily on issues of representation in decision making (Council of Europe 1998:68).
- (3) The Netherlands: Local Gender Impact assessment (EET).
- (4) The Netherlands: National Gender Impact Assessment/Emancipation Effect Reporting (EET) using professional consultancies. Holland was one of the first to develop an instrument for testing policy, coupling it firmly to a sophisticated understanding of the sources and expressions of gender inequality. The GIA developed there involved a lengthy process and the analysis has been carried out primarily on policies which are already developed, rather than during the process itself. Experts have been necessary to do the analysis from the outside in the first years of its use, and thus it has only been done a few times (Verloo and Roggeband 1996).
- (5) Flanders has introduced a Local Gender Impact Assessment (LEER) (Vander Steene, et. al. 1999). A simplified check list was developed and accompanied by an intensive training process organized by the League of Cities and Municipalities to enable towns to understand the instrument. Use of the LEER (Local Emancipation Effect Report) for analysis of policy is not required, but available as an alternative. Although target public were involved in development of the instrument, the training process is still going on (Wildiers and Lobijn 2001; Franken 2001:35). The routine itself will not be sufficient to serve for transformation. Municipalities are required to file

reports on gender equality with the federal government, but there is no information available on compliance.

- (6) Flanders has implemented Emancipation Effect Reporting (GIA) (Woodward and Meier 1997, 1998) This instrument was developed by academic experts as a variation on the Dutch National instrument, and tested on policy intention plans to demonstrate their level of gender sensitivity. The intention was to develop an instrument that could be applied early in the policy process and lead to policy changes to limit negative effects on gender relations. The administration feels that the 'instrument is too theoretical, and there was a lack of an implementation plan and the necessary political will to gain wide acceptance'. Again the instrument will be further simplified, which on the one hand may allow normal policy actors to carry it out, but will necessarily on the other hand be coupled to a loss in sophistication and ability to identify more complex aspects of gender inequality.
- (7) For the project 'Gender in Balance' outside experts were brought in to integrate gender sensibility into human resource policy in the Flemish Administration. The experts characterize the experience as one of both Roses and Thorns, with the thorns primarily to deal with the fact of the different points of departure in terms of gender understanding between the administrators and the outside experts, The project is continuing in 4 other divisions of the administration (Benschop and Verloo 2000).
- (8) In Denmark Local Authorities-Ringstead was one of the experimental projects sponsored by the Nordic Council of ministers in their pilot projects to spread mainstreaming in the Nordic countries. This project attempted in a local municipality to achieve greater gender balance in segregated jobs, which is more of an equal opportunities project than a mainstreaming project. The experience in the municipality with the need for a longer time frame to do transformation of expectations led to the decision to implement mainstreaming within national government using pilot projects in only a few ministries, rather than attempting to mainstream across the board (OECD mainstream web site, speech Jytte Anderssen, Danish Minister of Gender Equality, 24 November 2000, OECD conference November 2000).
- (9) From 1995 on Denmark has been experimenting with a legislative review evaluating national legislative proposals from a gender perspective, beginning with labour market legislation. The evaluation looks at whether the proposal promotes equality and what the consequences are for the relation between women and men. A help group from the Equality Minister provides expert advice to the actors (Council of Europe 1998:66-67).
- (10) SMART initiative, GIA instrument for European Commission. Given that the level of gender awareness and competence varies dramatically, a commission was given to an outside expert to develop a check list for seeing whether policies needed to be gender proofed or not. The SMART instrument is undoubtedly one of the simplest developed, but also characterizes the enormous distance between the ambitions of mainstreaming and what



organizations may make of it. It consists of two questions: is the policy proposal directed at one or more target groups? Are there differences between women and men in the field of the policy proposal (with regard to rights, resources, positions, representation, values and norms? (Council of Europe 1998: 62).

Generally, the most sophisticated, tailor-made and time-consuming approaches involve the use of certified gender-expertise and a detailed analysis of the policy process, as exemplified by national efforts in Sweden and the Netherlands. These countries can be said to be in the relatively luxurious situation of knowing what gender mainstreaming is, having sufficient gender data and having developed a broad concept of gender equality (TECENA 2000; Outshoorn 1995, 1997). Yet, these two cases suffer from their very excellence, as they challenge policy makers with transformative issues. The costs of mainstreaming with this approach are quite substantial and will remain high until gender is taken to be a matter of course. It is probably not random that this approach was chosen by two countries with substantial sophistication in gender equality. But even with relative sophistication, mainstreaming can be difficult. Symptomatic is that the Nordic Council of Ministers launched its efforts in mainstreaming with pilot projects within the terrain of labour market and youth policies. Yet, even in these policy areas, which share frames which should be sympathetic to gender, many projects stranded at the level focusing on women's representation and other equal opportunity issues (OECD 2000; Main Messages).

At the other end of the scale are efforts carried out by in-house bureaucrats, as in Flanders and in one example from Denmark, and the first European Commission Smart instrument. While all of these projects recommend continual training and awareness development, the instruments themselves are less intrusive, and thus can be carried out by civil servants with a low level of gender expertise. Both the broader European Commission and the Flemish case can be characterized as settings that are relatively resistant to gender equality issues. This can be seen in for example, the gender segregation of top level staffing, and the late adoption of gender equality statements. For different reasons, neither setting has a high degree of gender expertise present among its own staff members. In the Flemish case Women's Studies is only recently available as an educational option at the post-graduate level. In the case of the European Commission, permanent staff examinations are aimed at generalists. Gender expertise is present primarily among employees of the gender equality machinery and specially recruited experts. There is relatively high mobility among staff in the European Commission, as promotion often entails transfer to another unit. Thus for example, in DG-Development, staff members responsible for mainstreaming have been replaced frequently, and long vacancies have hamstrung progress, despite the presence of good gender impact instruments (Bouvret 2001; Braithwaite 2001).

For all of these settings it is essential that gender mainstreamers find a niche in the policy process that is routine and coupled with resources. Otherwise the risk is great that policy makers will talk about gender mainstreaming but not do it.

Gender expertise in the state and mainstream implementers:  
The results for complexity of mainstreaming efforts

Implementors:		Experts	Bureaucrats
<b>G E N D E R</b>	HIGH	1) Sweden - Flying expert  4) Holland-National Gender Impact Assessment consulting  7) Flanders Gender in Balance	2) Sweden-Local authorities self-examination-3R
	LOW	3) Holland-Local Gender Impact Checklist	5) Flanders-Local LEER/GIA  6) Flanders-Regional Emancipation Effect Reporting/GIA  8) DK- Ringstead Local Evaluations  9) DK-Legislative Evaluation  10) EU-SMART Simple Method to Assess Relevance of Policies to Gender

The gender expertise refers to the level of gender sophistication necessary to carry out the required analysis, while the implementors are those who carry out the analysis. In the ideal mainstreaming world, the fourth cell of the table will gradually become empty, as more sophisticated instruments are learned by bureaucrats who have become gender aware in the process of mainstreaming.

Even the weaker instruments of Flanders or Denmark or the local checklists to be used in Holland have a great potential. By requiring their application, and thereby requiring that policy makers learn how to use them, gender tools become part of an institutional learning process. The necessity is to design an adaptable system that will keep doing gender even as different political winds blow. In some ways the simple model may be a better strategy than 'susceptible' one-off reform packages with expensive external experts. However the 'time when we don't need to speak this language because the languages will have changed' is going to be a long way off. Policy tools can perhaps speed up learning, and this is what mainstreaming is potentially well placed to do. It is to

be hoped that it will not entirely adapt the language of power, but will retain a strong dialect of its own.

In any critical understanding of the mainstreaming approach, the symbolic use of politics should not be ignored (Edelman 1967; Harrop 1992:278). Mainstreaming may not lead to a dramatically more sensitive policy process that no longer precedes from 'male' as the norm. Yet, by moving beyond the walls of the velvet ghetto of state feminism, mainstreaming efforts may create an 'Aha'-effect in unsuspected quarters. Mainstreaming can serve as a mode of public learning.

The challenge is to expand this analysis: using one or a combination of the predictive schemes identifying critical success factors that have thus far been developed to carry out comparative research of mainstreaming efforts, successes and failures within different sorts of institutions at the international, national, regional and local levels.

## **10. Conclusion**

The question posed was whether mainstreaming was innovative or deceptive in European policy. The answer is a little of both, as mainstreaming is now being talked about and applied at all levels of government, with widely varying approaches. Deception remains a risk thanks to blurring of affirmative action/equality with mainstreaming, as we can see in an examination of the evolution of definitions in different settings. However, gender mainstreaming and equal opportunity are not unrelated. As the OECD emphasizes:

"Greater equality between women and men can only be based on an understanding of their relative roles and needs as revealed through gender analysis. Conversely, enhancing the role of women through equal opportunity is helpful to implementing gender mainstreaming. But affirmative action alone does not necessarily build the capacities, systems and institutions needed to fully achieve the implementation and promise of gender mainstreaming."

(Definitions-OECD web page [http://www.oecd.org/subject/gender\\_mainstreaming/about/](http://www.oecd.org/subject/gender_mainstreaming/about/)).

By agreeing to the terms of the Beijing Platform for Action (UN 1995), governments have taken on an obligation 'to do something'. It is to be hoped that the goals set by the international forum will lead to more than simply symbolic actions. Yet, there is some value in broadening agendas. The case of mainstreaming is a demonstration of how gender issues can spur creativity and can potentially transform organisations. It is also a good case to illustrate the paradoxes of gender in organisations.

Ferree and Martin (1995:10) wisely point out in their review of the impact of feminist organizations on organisations themselves, that feminist organization in some of its forms will probably have a transformative effect on their members, and on society itself, but that a wide range of organizational tactics is necessary and that one should not prejudge one type of feminist organizational strategy as more effective than another. Different languages and different tools are necessary depending on what feminists wish to achieve and in what contexts.

Mainstreaming strategically is a tool that can offer innovation in public management. There is a tension in public organisation to become as result-driven as private organisations. Further, 'problems' today do not admit themselves to unilinear solutions through rational models of social engineering, as was perhaps hoped at some time in the past in policy science circles. Gender analysts are clear in seeing that the issue of gender relations is not indisputable, and would in any way not be suitable for solution by a public rational machine with easily controllable and clearly functional parts.

The approach of mainstreaming began initially by speaking the language of modern management, which is result-driven, requiring instrumental and rational measurement. This may ultimately bring about a heightened ability for policy makers to deal with the cross-cutting problems of inequality that breach rational models. The mission to mainstream gender concerns into all areas of policy will ultimately require a fundamental commitment from those in power. Public organizations are 'at bottom' political. Yes, they are bureaucracies to an extent, they are meritocracies to an extent; but they are permeated by politics." (Martin, 1998:325). Without a consideration of power relationships, the transformative potential of mainstreaming will come to naught.

Gender mainstreaming has the potential to permanently transform the language and images of policy making to become more inclusive and sensitive to diversity. Reaching this place ironically requires a strategic usage of the practices and existing language of government. If femocrats, academics and experts in coalition with the women's movement succeed in helping officials to better see the 'Truth' of gender through using the positive aspects of rationality, strategically speaking it may have been worth it. Gender mainstreaming is fashionable but it is not an end in itself - the aim is gender equality. If we can get closer by using these tools, words and methods, then perhaps it is worth the compromise that speaking the language of power entails, and mainstreaming will be a real innovation.

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